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WASHINGTON  
COLBY

William Colby, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), said today that government officials who disclose classified information should be subject to criminal penalties.

Colby made the recommendation at a hearing of the Senate Government Operations Committee, which is reviewing President Reagan's national security directive 84, issued last April.

The order requires prepublication review of any material written by former government officials with access to classified information and allows the use of lie detectors to investigate leaks.

Several committee members said they were concerned the order would conflict with the freedom of the press provisions of the Constitution and would limit public information about government activities.

Colby said a law against disclosure of top secret material could be written so that it would have only a limited impact on the news media and the public's access to information.

"It would seem that a proper statute could be drawn which would not have too broad an impact but would still have the main function of deterring some of the more outrageous leaks and disclosures that go on in our government," Colby said.

He said leaks of secret material should be a misdemeanor while disclosure of top secret information should be a felony.

Colby said he submitted his own book in advance for CIA review and had material about an intelligence operation deleted. He was later fined because one edition of the book was published by mistake with the deleted material.

A Justice Department official told the committee the CIA had reviewed about 900 publications in advance over the past five years and removed classified material in about 250 cases.

"A regime of prepublication review -- that prior restraint to which the framers of our Constitution were so unremittingly hostile -- must be limited to those situations in which it is demonstrably needed to preserve the government's most sensitive secrets," Maryland Republican Charles Mathias said.